Experiences of employed women with attention deficit hyperactive disorder: A phenomenological study.

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Abstract

BACKGROUND:
Employees with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) face various risks in the workplace. Little is known of the specific challenges women with ADHD experience.

OBJECTIVE:
To explore the experiences of working women with ADHD and learn the strategies and accommodations that facilitate their maintaining employment.

METHOD:
Qualitative phenomenological approach was used to echo women's subjective perceptions and experiences representing their daily interactions in their workplace. In-depth interviews were conducted with eleven tertiary-educated employed women (M = 33.5; SD = 6.61 years), diagnosed with ADHD and the transcripts were analysed by three researchers, using the qualitative phenomenological approach.

RESULTS:
Most interviewed women with ADHD described interactions with their workplace as confusing, overwhelming, and chaotic. They perceived their ADHD as a significant obstacle to success in employment that also conferred some advantages. Three interview themes are explored here (1) challenges in coping with job demands and the workplace, including the disclosure dilemma; (2) personal coping strategies; (3) useful accommodations.

CONCLUSIONS:
For the women interviewed, employment was important for their self-identity, beyond simply making a living. Their experiences indicate impaired executive functioning and inhibition and sensory sensitivity, consistently with theoretical models for ADHD. They identified gender-specific issues, such as using medication during pregnancy, which led them to seek for non-pharmacological coping mechanisms. They contributed practical knowledge regarding employee-led adaptations and employer-provided workplace accommodations.